

SPEECH
OF
MR. BRYAN,
ON THE PROPOSITION
TO AMEND THE CONSTITUTION
OF THE UNITED STATES,
RESPECTING THE
Election of President and Vice President.

DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

March 13, 1826.

THE following resolutions, proposed by Mr. McDuffie, being under consideration, in committee of the whole, viz :

“Resolved, That, for the purpose of electing the President and Vice President of the United States, the Constitution ought to be amended in such manner as will prevent the election of the aforesaid officers from devolving on Congress.

Resolved, That a uniform system of voting by Districts ought to be established in all the States, the number of Districts in each State to equal the number of Senators and Representatives to which such State may be entitled in Congress, and each District having one vote.

Resolved, That a select committee be appointed, with instructions to prepare and report a joint resolution, embracing the aforesaid objects.”

Mr. BRYAN, of North Carolina, rose and addressed the committee as follows :

MR. CHAIRMAN : I regret that, to the other disadvantages under which I labor in addressing the committee in this stage of the debate, that of bodily indisposition should be added ; but, as I have the privilege of the floor to-day, I am determined to exercise it.

I am not desirous to impose upon this Committee a general essay upon the Constitution; but I confess, sir, I am solicitous to explain the reasons of my vote, and willing to assume all the just responsibilities of my station. In doing this, as briefly as I can, I may be permitted to regret my political inexperience and want of constitutional learning; but, sir, I derive some consolation from the belief, that, if I am inexperienced, I am also unprejudiced. I have not been reared at the feet of any political Gamaliel; my opinions of men and measures, erroneous though they may be, are my own; they have not been assumed by *compact*: and therefore, sir, I feel myself at liberty to correct and amend them as experience may dictate. Upon the subject of this constitutional reformation, I have earnestly endeavored to discover the true meaning and spirit of the Constitution, and am sincerely desirous to carry these into full and complete effect. God forbid that I should ever be so weak or so wicked as to displace one stone of this hallowed temple where liberty delights to dwell, for any other purpose than to secure her permanent abode. I most solemnly assure the committee, that, if I could be impelled by other motives—more especially, sir, if I should attempt to unfix a column, to promote party views or individual aggrandizement, I should deem myself an imitator—yes, sir, an humble imitator of the wretch who applied the torch of destruction to the Ephesian temple to gain an execrable immortality.

It would be a vain regret, sir, to express my sorrow, that I cannot spread before the committee the rich classical repast with which they have been so sumptuously regaled by the honorable gentleman from Massachusetts, (Mr. EVERETT.) It has not been my lot, like him, to breathe the inspiring zephyrs of the land of Homer; I have not had my imagination fixed, and my heart exhilarated and ennobled by treading the plains of Marathon and Platea; I have not mused amid the ruins of Athens; and gathered lessons of political wisdom from the silent, but impressive memorials of her departed greatness, nor has fair science, "rich with the spoils of time," unfolded to me those secret treasures which she could not conceal from that honorable gentleman.

I come not here, sir, from the Lyceum or the Portico; I come, sir, from the Court-yards and cotton fields of North Carolina; and I come, sir, to proclaim the wishes and assert the rights of the People I have the honor to represent. My life, sir, has been spent among the People of my native State, the most valued part of my poli-

tical information has been derived from association and converse with my fellow-citizens. I know their wants, and I *feel* them, too; I know, sir, that they wish to participate in the election of the Chief Magistrate of this Union, and that they are dissatisfied with the present mode of expressing their voice—if expression it may be called.

In endeavoring to reply to the argument of the honorable gentleman from Massachusetts, I hope he will do me the justice to believe, that I do so in a spirit of kindness and respect. I should do violence to my own feelings were I to act o'herwise: for, although I differ from him materially on some points, yet, when I can agree with him, I do so with lively satisfaction. He has told us, sir, that it would be unconstitutional to make these amendments. Unconstitutional! sir. This assertion is certainly contradictory to experience—to the Constitution itself, and the argument seems to move in a circle. We know, sir, that amendments have been made—that one of these, the amendment of 1804, by confining the choice of the States, when the election devolves upon the House of Representatives to three, instead of the five highest on the list of those voted for by the electors, has made a material change—it impaired, too, sir, a federative power, and increased a popular one. Suppose, sir, that it should be necessary to vest in the General Government powers which an emergency might render essential for the preservation of the Union. Cases might occur which I do not even wish to imagine. Must these powers be usurped at the hazard of revolution and bloodshed? Must we sit here like the Roman Senate? quietly fold our arms and await our destruction with dignity? or must we not rather apply for these powers in the mode prescribed by the Constitution? Our ancestors well knew that they could not pierce the veil of futurity, and provide for events beyond the ken of mortal wisdom. They provided a *remedy*, sir, for evils which might be disclosed by experience and practice; and they provided a security against amendments proposed from “light and transient causes” by the *mode* in which alone they can be effected. The honorable gentleman from Massachusetts has sought to draw an argument in support of his position from the proviso of the fifth article of the Constitution, “that no amendment which may be made prior to the year 1808, shall in any manner affect the first and fourth clauses in the ninth section of the first article; and that no State, without its consent shall be deprived of its equal suffrage in the Senate.”

Now, sir, to my mind, this clause, so far from helping his argument, militates most strongly against it; it indicates, to my understanding, that this special exception was necessary to exempt from amendment, for a limited time, the first and fourth clauses mentioned in it, and to confine any amendment of the federative feature in the Senate, which should deprive a State of its equal right, to the special case of the States consenting to it. I should, therefore, sir, most strongly infer, according to a very old and sound rule of construction—that the power of amendment in other cases was to be inferred. Self-preservation is the primary law of societies, as well as of individuals, and if necessary we must act upon it.

The honorable gentleman from Massachusetts seems to think that the powers of the President have been greatly magnified by my honorable friend from S. Carolina (Mr. McDuffie;) he deems them very limited, and not the proper object of much jealousy. I can assure him, sir, that he thinks very differently from the fathers of the Revolution, and the framers of this Constitution, and the States who adopted it. The powers of this Executive Chief excited very lively apprehensions in the bosoms of some of the purest and wisest of our forefathers. Some thought they had an “awful squinting” at monarchy—they imagined that they could discern “the diadem sparkling on his brow, and the imperial purple flowing in his train.” And how, sir, did the advocates of the Constitution endeavor to lull these apprehensions? Not, sir, as that honorable gentleman has done, by endeavoring to persuade the People that his powers were not great; but that they were necessary to give proper consistency and strength to the system—that he was properly checked by the other departments—that he was elected for short periods, and liable to impeachment—but, above all, that he was dependent upon the People. Let us examine, sir, a few of his constitutional attributes. He is the representative of his country, among the nations of the earth. He originates treaties, and, with the advice of the Senate, confirms them; and they are the supreme law of the land. It is his prerogative to receive ambassadors, and, with the advice of the Senate, to send them. He is commander-in-chief of the Army and Navy of the United States. His qualified veto gives him an important agency in Legislation itself. He can elevate to offices of the greatest dignity and emolument. His patronage embraces the distribution of millions. He operates upon the hopes

and fears of thousands. Although he has not the constitutional power of making war, yet, by means of his other powers, he can at any time place his country in a belligerent state. Suppose he should refuse to receive the British or French ambassador, or send him home with contumely and insult. Suppose, under the act for suppression of the slave trade, he should order our cruisers to capture vessels in the Mediterranean, or upon some unfounded suspicion. Indeed, sir, many cases might be supposed, when, by an undue exercise of a constitutional power, he might draw upon us the anger of a foreign nation. But, says the honorable gentleman from Massachusetts, the king of Great Britain can elevate to the peerage the humblest individual, and ennoble him and his posterity. Indeed, sir, he seemed to describe the dazzling honors of a coronet with so much rapture, that those who did not know him, might have suspected that, during his residence abroad, he had conceived an affection for what Chatham could not refuse.

Before I dismiss this brief examination, sir, lest I should be mistaken, I will take the liberty to say, that although I believe the powers of the President to be great, yet I believe them to be necessary for the safety of the Republic. What the jealous statesmen of the Revolution, with Washington at their head, have given, I will not presume to impair. The stress or intent of my argument, sir, is to show, that the greater power, the greater necessity that the due dependency on the People should be preserved.

I will admit, sir, that, before any amendment is adopted, its adaptation to the genius and spirit of the Government ought to be satisfactorily ascertained: for it is obvious that maxims and political reasons, which would justly be entitled to great weight when applied to a consolidated Government, one and indivisible, such as Britain, or any of the ancient Republics, would be inapplicable to a Government compounded as ours is of national and federative features. They too often serve to create false analogies, and lead us astray from the true point of inquiry. The checks and balances of the British Constitution are contrived and intended to protect and preserve the king, lords, and commons, who are all integral parts of the same state—different classes of the same political society. The checks and balances of our Constitution are intended to protect the Union, the States, and the People. The States, according to the theory of our Constitution, are independent members of a confederacy, and are themselves, in many respects,

overeign. We must, therefore, always keep in our mind's eye, this leading and animating principle, when we sit in judgment upon this great work of our fathers. In all human affairs, "Self-love, the spring of action, moves the soul." This principle is ever active and vigilant, and may be relied upon as a faithful sentinel for its own preservation.

The framers of the Constitution well knew that the States were the best guardians of State rights—the People of popular rights; it was only necessary, therefore, to give them respectively in this form of Government, adequate power, and their self-love and interest might be relied upon, for their exercise and preservation: if this could be done, and the political machine which was to be moved by these powers so adjusted, that they should have a harmonious and salutary action—the grand object of all government was attained—they had then a self-creating political movement, whose object was the happiness of the governed. It would be collateral, Mr. Chairman, to the present inquiry, and would also be presumptuous in me to attempt to point out to the committee the many indications of these mixed principles. The subject before us regards solely the Constitution of the President and Vice President. Was it to be supposed, that they should lose sight of these controlling principles in the mode of appointing this great officer—the Executive Chief of the confederated Republic—whose constitutional action was to have so important, so pervading an influence in the character of the Government—the policy and the destiny of the nation. No sir, it was not to be expected, nor has it so occurred. The Constitution declares that "Each State shall appoint, in such manner as the Legislature thereof may direct, a number of electors, equal to the whole number of Senators and Representatives to which the State may be entitled in Congress," &c. It then proceeds to direct that they shall meet in their respective States, and ballot for President and Vice President, and points out the mode of conducting the election by the electoral colleges.

It seems to me, Mr. Chairman, that the Constitution here, by the word "State," means the Commonwealth—the political society—the People, or at least that portion of them who exercise the elective franchise, and, therefore, that wherever the State Legislatures have exercised the power of appointing the electors, instead of simply directing the mode in which the State should appoint them, they have violated the rights of the People. It

would have been very easy, if 'he power was intended to be given to the Legislatures, to have used expressions plainly indicative of such an intent—and the inference that they would have done so, is rendered to my mind irresistible, by recurring to the first clause of the third section, which prescribes the mode of electing Senators. The expression there is, "The Senate of the United States shall be composed of two Senators from each State, chosen by *the Legislature* thereof," &c. But the honorable gentleman from Virginia, the second from that State who spoke in this debate, (Mr. STEVENSON,) contends, and his argument is supported by the honorable gentleman who immediately preceded me, (Mr. EVERETT,) that it is not only Constitutional for the Legislatures to exercise this power of appointing the electors, but that it was even expected they would do so. Sir, I do most conscientiously differ from these gentlemen, and I will endeavor, by the indulgence of the Committee, to shew, that, if the contemporary exposition of this part of the Constitution, by its advocates is to be relied upon, that it was *not* so understood and explained. If Hamilton and Madison combined, and agreeing upon this point, are entitled to credit, it was intended that the *People* should exercise this power of appointment.

I refer, Sir, to the "Federalist," a series of essays written before the adoption of the Constitution, by Madison, Hamilton, and Jay for the purpose of explaining and recommending it to the People of the United States, and which is now resorted to, by all parties, as the ablest and most authoritative exposition of its true intent and meaning. In No. LXVIII., Hamilton, speaking of the mode of electing the President says, "It was desirable that the sense of the People should operate in the choice of the person to whom so important a trust was to be confided. This end will be answered by committing the right of making it, not to any pre-established body, but to men (electors) *chosen by the People*, for the special purpose, and at the particular conjuncture." "A small number of persons (electors) *chosen by their fellow citizens* from the general mass, will be most likely to possess the information and discernment requisite to so complicated an investigation."

The language of Mr. Madison, in the Convention of Virginia, which assembled in 1788, for the purpose of considering whether they would adopt this Constitution, is equally, or more, clear and explicit. Instead of the People's voting immediately for President, which he thought the population and extent of our territory might

render impracticable: "instead of this, (immediate suffrage) *the People* choose the electors—this can be done with ease and convenience, and the *choice* will be more select." If we examine the debates of his Convention, we shall find that it was so understood also, by those who opposed the Constitution. This meaning was assumed as the basis of argument on both sides; and, if we reflect a moment on the very many able men who sat in that Convention, it would be most violent presumption to say, they were mistaken with all their talents and all their lights.

If we assume, then, that this was the intention of the Constitution, let us see what has been its operation. Have the People chosen the electors? I ask this question, Mr. Chairman, in the name of my constituents, and I wish an explicit answer. From the omission in the Constitution to prescribe a specific mode, (which I think I shall be able to show, if my strength will permit, was done intentionally and wisely)—from this omission, I say, sir, a great latitude of construction, and a great diversity of practice, has originated. In some States the Legislatures appoint—in some the general ticket system prevails—in some few the district system, and in others a compound of some two or all of these modes. My honorable friend from South Carolina, (Mr. McDUFFIE,) has depicted the mischiefs of this confused and unsettled system in such strong and glowing colors, that I cannot presume to add any thing to their effect. It is true, sir, that, by the present mode, combinations may be, and have been, formed, which have prevented a fair expression of the popular will. The People are called upon to vote a ticket, (under the general ticket system,) containing 15, 24 or 36 names—to vote for, to *choose* persons, of whom they may never have heard before—of whose qualifications they have never had an opportunity of judging—whose integrity has never been tested—and if this ticket had dropped from the clouds, they must take it or lose their vote. Call you this *choice*, sir? I always thought, sir, that choice involved selection of one or more from others—"from the general mass"—that it involved knowledge, comparison, voluntary preference, and was a right of more or less value, according to the importance of its object. What temptation and opportunity is presented, by this system, for intrigue and management! What apathy and indifference are manifested by the People, for such a feeble and dubious exercise of this great Constitutional privi-

ilege! Even under the excitement of the late election, how many neglected the exercise of this right! And should it not be, sir, the policy of every wise government to interest its citizens in its organization? Under the present system, how many worthy citizens remain at home, under the paralyzing influence of a conviction that they can do no good—that the election is in the hands of the cunning few, and that it is a mere mockery for them singly—without concert—without the animation derived from a prospect of success, to pretend to withstand the disciplined cohorts opposed to them. This lethargy is almost worse than faction itself. It is more secret—more insidious in its approaches. It disguises itself under the name of moderation, and aversion to debate and strife, when it too often proceeds from a criminal indifference to those rights which our ancestors bled and died to secure. They are men of business—they can't lose the chance of turning a penny to promote any public measure. It would seem, sir, as if some of them had taken, in earnest, the sarcastic advice of the Roman satirist—

“Virtus post nummos.”

Let any man look abroad—through the *Union*, I mean and deny, if he can, that this is a faithful picture. Surely, sir, it requires no prophetic voice to warn us against so dangerous a delusion—Surely, sir, we will spare a little time to listen to the “Farewell Address” of the Father of his Country.

I admit, sir, that it is not sufficient to show the existence of an evil, unless it can be remedied, either wholly or partially—but, I insist, sir, that the adoption of the district system, as proposed by the good old State I have the honor, in part, to represent, so inadequately—and a direct vote, in districts, for President and Vice President, will cure the most alarming of these evils. The Constitution, by interposing the electoral colleges, undoubtedly intended that they should exercise a sound discretion in the choice of the President—they were “to analyze his qualifications, and judiciously combine motives of choice.” Fed. No. 68. But, sir, the People of this Country, as has been shown in this debate, and elsewhere, have not been content with simply the right of originating the Colleges, even when committed to them by their State Legislatures—they have always required a pledge, or some evidence, of the Elector or Electors, for whom they intended to give the ultimate vote, before they would give their vote to him

or them. Here, then, sir, the intention of the Constitution has been manifestly defeated—this seems to be a case in which experience suggests amendment. The People, sir, although they will hear argument and reason, yet will finally judge for themselves. But even here, I would lay my hands on this venerated instrument with great reluctance. The pure and enlightened views of its framers plead strongly in its behalf—and although we may not now discover the evils that may result from the change, yet time—time and casualty may disclose them. But, sir, as I believe that the design of its framers has been defeated, I would hazard this amendment.

It would have, sir, I think, the effect of rousing the People from their torpid quietism—it will make them feel that their voice is heard—that their vote is felt—and the voting directly and immediately for the man of their choice, will of itself be productive of a lively satisfaction; they will then know that their vote is given as they wished it should be, and is beyond the control of any political legerdemain. They will not be agitated by the merits of the several electoral candidates, but their eye will repose singly on the man of their ultimate choice. I understand a case has occurred in Maryland, where there were two electoral candidates for the same Presidential candidate, and one for another Presidential candidate, and although the district gave a large majority for the Presidential candidate who had two friends as electoral candidates; yet the third candidate obtained the greatest plurality, and thus the vote of the district was given to that candidate for the Presidency, against whom there was a large majority. This cannot happen when the People vote directly for the President. An honorable gentleman from New York, (Mr. STORRS,) has asked those who contend for this expression of the popular will in this mode—why not extend the principle? and has alluded to a species of population which, without being citizens, is counted in estimating the ratio of representation from the Southern States. Sir, if he had shewn us that this amendment would have conferred any additional power on these States, the observation would have had some bearing; or if he had shewn that they would have derived any peculiar advantage, it would have been more plausibly introduced into debate; but as it is—whatever it may be—it is not an argument.

The honorable gentleman from Virginia who spoke first, (Mr. ARCHER,) has discoursed with much State pride on the freehold—*viva voce* suffrage of Virginia.

He has told us that the mode of voting by ballot is a sneaking way—that they “sneak up to the polls,” and that he would exile himself if the freehold qualification was abolished in Virginia. Now, Mr. Chairman, I have understood that a large portion of the citizens of Virginia, particularly in the West, are very anxious to have their Constitution amended in order to be permitted to exercise the elective franchise—but perhaps, after the honorable gentleman’s threat to leave them if they do—they may desist. I imagine, sir, that it would be an easy matter for any other State to give her citizens the same independence as the citizens of Virginia have, by adopting the same mode—by making a freehold necessary to vote, and by protecting that freehold from the payment of debts—they might then, sir, be so independent as not only to tell a candidate *viva voce*, that they would not vote for him—but also, that they would not pay him a just debt—and that too “*viva voce*,” sir. But, sir, with the right of suffrage, the Constitution has laudably omitted to interfere; nor does this amendment seek to interfere. The Constitution has omitted it, sir, as I said, for the wisest reasons.

The requisites to the right of suffrage are very different, in the different States, and even in adjoining States: in Virginia, as we have seen, none but freeholders can vote—in North Carolina, sir, it is the birthright of every freeman. If, therefore, the Constitution had attempted to fix an uniform rule on this subject, the strange anomaly might have been presented of a man’s voting for the highest officer in the Union, who could not vote for the lowest State officer. It might also have interfered materially with the polity of a State. This amendment, therefore, sir, does not at all interfere with State rights: their quantity of power remains the same: its ratio of adjustment is not disturbed—and either with regard to the Union, or each other, they preserve the same relative rights. It will also prevent the arraying of State against State—as the supporters of the President will be diffused through the Union; unreasonable jealousies will thus be prevented, and sectional feelings and appellations against which the Father of his Country entertained so much apprehension, will be deprived of one of their most powerfully exciting causes, and it may well be doubted whether any citizen of any State, with an American feeling, would not greatly prefer that the candidate of his choice should be President, than that his State should give an undivided vote.

I will now pass, sir, to the other branch of the proposed amendment. Shall the power of electing the President and Vice President, in the last resort, be taken from the House of Representatives? Upon this amendment, I confess Sir, I have entertained great and serious doubts—and these, sir, have arisen from an investigation which I have endeavored to make of the genius and spirit of our Constitution, and the principles of compromise upon which it was founded. I came to the conclusion that I would abstain from this alteration—as far as I am concerned—at least until I have more lights and experience. By leaving it as it is, we leave it as it has existed and flourished for half a century, and as our ancestors bequeathed it to us. I will, however, sir, endeavor to disclose the reasons which led me to this conclusion, which I must do in a brief and hurried manner, as my laboring breast has already repeatedly admonished me to cease.

The first General Government, of American origin, was composed of that illustrious body, the Old Continental Congress, which assembled for the first time at Carpenter's Hall, in Philadelphia, on the 5th September, 1774; its object was to provide for the emergency occasioned by the differences with the Mother Country—to unite the resources of all the English Colonies—and to adopt such common measures for the redress of their grievances and establishment of their rights, as their situation required and allowed. The Delegation of each Colony had one vote—and although their powers were enforced by no higher sanction than mere recommendation,—yet never were imperial decrees more implicitly obeyed. They were, in fact, nothing more than a Congress of Ambassadors. It was, however, soon discovered, as the enthusiasm and zeal for liberty subsided, that all government must depend, for support and obedience, upon power, and must be able to address its mandates to other passions and interests, than those of patriotism and love of the public weal. As early as June, '76, measures were taken to form a confederated government, and in November, '77, Congress solemnly declared that it could no longer be deferred, but was essential to their very existence, as a free People. Hence originated the Articles of Confederation, which were not finally adopted by all the States till March, 1781. By these, each State had one vote—and that distinguishing feature of a confederated government, that it operated upon States, instead of individuals, was preserved. There were many other defects, unnecessary here to be enumerated—in a

word, it was justly termed "a rope of sand," and a more energetic Government was loudly demanded by the wants and wishes of the American People.

I will not impose upon the patience of the Committee, by attempting to detail the occurrences which led to the convention of Delegates at Philadelphia, in May, 1787; but, sir, I deem it very material to a just conception of the nature of our Constitution, to view it in its rude outlines and imperfect state—to examine it in its progressive shapes through the Convention—at least those features of it which are now under discussion. This Convention, sir, had several plans before them; one proposed by Edmund Randolph, of Virginia, and called the Virginia plan: by this it was proposed that the President should be elected by the National Legislature. In the plan proposed by Charles Pinckney, of South Carolina, it was not stated in what manner he should be elected. The New Jersey plan, offered by Mr. Paterson, proposed that he should be elected by the United States in Congress. Col. Hamilton's plan proposed that he should be elected by Electors, chosen by the People in Districts.

By the draft of a Constitution reported by a Committee of five, consisting of Messrs. Rutledge, Randolph, Gornam, Ellsworth, and Wilson, on the 6th August, '87, he was to be elected by ballot by the Legislature. On the 4th September ensuing, a grand Committee of eleven, one from each State, to whom the subject had been referred, reported a plan by which the mode, as it originally stood in the Constitution, was recommended, except that, if no one of the candidates had a majority, the Senate were to choose from the five highest on the list.

A motion was made in Convention to substitute the House of Representatives for the Senate, with the qualification of the Delegation from each State having an equal vote, (one.) For this proposition, sir, there were ten States; and against it, but one—and that one, Mr. Chairman, was the State which has the honor to be represented by you, (Delaware,) the smallest in the Convention. This brief survey will shew that this adjustment was most thoroughly considered—

"Tantæ molis erat, condere gentem."

The proposition that the Senate should elect, points clearly to the State power; and this qualification being retained when it was transferred to the House of Representatives, shews conclusively that this was a point not to be conceded. Indeed, sir, the Convention re-

peatedly decided against any mode by which this officer should be elected, without a participation by the States as *States*; the plan finally adopted was the result of fair compromise, and was much complained of at the time, as giving too much influence to the large States. Let us recollect, too, sir, that by the amendment of 1804, which I before mentioned, this State right has been considerably abridged.

The power of the House, as exercised in this election, is really the only *purely federative* feature that now remains. The Senate do not vote by *States*, but individually. But, sir, the great argument relied on is the liability of this House to corruption—to undue dependency by the expectation of honors and offices. I know, sir, that patronage addresses itself to some of the most powerful feelings that reign in the human breast—to hope, to pleasing hope—that passion which animates the Lottery adventurer, and the Monarch on the embattled plain—to the desire of distinction, from which the wisest and best are not exempt—to ambition, which, however immoderate, persuades itself that it is our country, and not ourselves, that we serve. I admit, sir, that the arguments of the honorable gentleman from South Carolina, (Mr. McDUFFIE,) deserve great consideration; but, sir, they prove too much, if any thing—they certainly prove, as the honorable gentleman from Massachusetts, (Mr. EVERETT,) has shewn, that we ought not to be entrusted with the mighty powers of legislation, which the Constitution has vested us with, and which involve the weal or woe, not only of this nation, but perhaps of the world. I cannot see those frightful omens which some gentlemen think they can discover in the political horizon. I see no bulwark of the Constitution broken down; the ramparts are entire, and the sentinels, I trust, are at their posts. I have not heard the tocsin of alarm sounded by the State Legislatures, nor have I seen the flaming brand passed from hill to hill.

The late Presidential election duly and constitutionally devolved upon this House, and was duly and constitutionally made, and every good citizen is, I trust, disposed to judge "all those in authority" by their measures.

But, sir, if the deformed features of corruption have been here manifested—is there no mode of expelling the monster, but by digging up the foundations of the constitutional edifice? If the golden shower has penetrated the massy walls of the Capitol—close the avenues; if we cannot resist temptation, let us fly it.

Let us pass a self denying ordinance—exclude members from office. But do not, sir, because we are frail, disfigure the monuments of our ancestors' wisdom and virtue. Let us rather endeavor to elevate ourselves to their standard, than destroy the standard itself. I have thus endeavored, Mr. Chairman, not only to express my opinion, but to assign my reasons. I was not disposed to shrink from responsibility by a silent vote for these amendments. I feel a conviction, sir, that I have at least endeavored to do my duty ; and, sir, there is no feeling I prize more highly, or would purchase more dearly.

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